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Lawmakers announce state funding for Hamlin Lake dam replacement

LANSING – Residents and vacationers near Ludington State Park would see much-needed repairs to the aging Hamlin Lake dam now that the Legislature authorized money to replace it, announced state lawmakers and local leaders Thursday.

“Hamlin Lake contributes so much to the Mason County economy that replacing the dam has been a top priority for me,” said Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores. “Local residents depend on the dam to bring in tourist dollars so I’m pleased to see this project advance. I strongly urge the governor to sign this.”

A spending bill approved this week would contribute up to \$500,000 toward the cost of the project. The federal government has authorized a \$1.2 million grant. The dam blocks water leaving the Big Sable River, creating Hamlin Lake, a popular tourist area that borders Ludington State Park and the Manistee National Forest. The dam is located within the state park.

“This is great news for area residents and visitors that rely on Hamlin Lake for recreation or their livelihoods,” said Rep. David Palsrok, R-Manistee. “A good portion of the local economy is tied to the lake and its related activities, so maintaining the dam is an investment in the future of the surrounding community.”

Van Woerkom and Palsrok joined Jim Pinkerton, Mason County commissioner and vice president of the Hamlin Lake Preservation Society, Kent Gage, preservation society president, and Nancy Sniegowski, Hamlin Township supervisor, in announcing the project at the dam site.

The dam was built in 1913 with the understanding that the state would provide maintenance. More than 90 years later, the structure has exceeded its life expectancy, and in 2000, an engineering firm recommended immediate repairs. Again in 2002, a state inspection recommended immediate repairs and determined that there was a “high” potential for dam failure.

The spending measure, Senate Bill 236, now heads to the governor for consideration.

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